



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Drinking Water

Published: 1993	Reviewed: April 2020
Category: Trail Management	Updated: April 2020

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), a §501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, works closely with Appalachian Trail volunteer maintaining clubs (“Clubs”) and other public and private partners to ensure the protection and stewardship of the natural, cultural, and experiential resources of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (known as ANST, A.T., or “the Trail”). Approximately fifty federal, state, or other public agencies have authority or jurisdiction over lands and resources within the protected A.T. corridor. ATC has a central management role by virtue of its Cooperative Agreement with the USDI National Park Service and its close working partnership with the USDA Forest Service and other agencies.

ATC's Trail management and conservation policies are meant to provide guidance for (a) dissemination to the public; (b) use and implementation by the ATC and the Clubs; and (c) recommendations for land-managing and other agencies. It is the agencies who work within their defined procedures to propose, administer, and enforce public policy. ATC policies are recommendations developed to support appropriate, coordinated Trail-wide management.

Overview

This policy is to provide guidance to trail clubs and agency partners regarding the management of backcountry or natural water sources available to A.T. visitors, and guidance regarding drinking water systems available within the A.T. Management area.

Policy

In most areas, visitors may obtain drinking water from natural sources along the Trail. Depending on seasonal conditions, sufficient water is generally available. Water sources may or may not be marked. Water is available for hikers from two sources:

- Natural or backcountry water sources, which are naturally occurring surface-water sources (including springs and seeps) that are undeveloped or minimally improved. Minimal improvements including construction of small catchment

ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Drinking Water

basins or other primitive collection devices that clearly do not indicate to the user that water is being provided from a developed, protected water system.

- Water systems typically are engineered systems that transport, store, or deliver water for human consumption. Improvements, such as wells, service connections, pumps, hand pumps, holding tanks, faucets, or spigots usually indicate that water is being provided through a water system.

ATC guidelines for natural or backcountry water sources are as follows:

1. ATC Web site, guidebooks, brochures, maps, other publications or mobile apps will emphasize the need to adequately treat water from water sources before use. Printed and on-line information will advise the reader that the purity of water from natural sources cannot be guaranteed, and all water should be treated before use. Other printed and on-line Trail publications that contain detailed information on hiker health and safety should continue to provide information on currently accepted methods for treating water.
2. While ATC recognizes the risks inherent in identifying water sources along the A.T., and the difficulty of keeping information regarding water sources current, it also recognizes the need to inform hikers as to where water can be found. ATC's marking standard, as outlined in *Appalachian Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance*, recommends methods for marking water supplies and encourages Trail clubs to assist hikers in locating water sources along the Trail. Water sources along the Trail may be identified by blue-blazed trails, directional signs, and guidebook or map references.
3. In order to inform hikers of potential hazards incident to the use of natural water sources, Trail clubs and agency partners should include information on signs at Trailheads (or in other appropriate locations) advising hikers to treat water from all sources before use. The specific language used for Trail-club signs should be reviewed and approved by the landowning agency partner.
4. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy will assist in making signs available to Trail clubs that can be posted at Trailheads or other appropriate locations along the



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Drinking Water

Appalachian Trail with prior approval of agency partners. These signs will contain a message that advises the public that water from unprotected natural sources should be treated before use.

5. Natural water sources should not be modified or developed in a manner that would lead the user to believe that the source is protected or that water from the source is safe to use without treatment.

6. Natural water sources located in an area where the potential for harmful chemical contamination is known to exist should not be identified to the public. Subject to availability of funds, ATC will assist Trail clubs in testing natural water sources suspected of chemical contamination. Where testing indicates that chemical contaminants are present, appropriate action should be taken to deter public use.

ATC guidelines for **water systems** are as follows:

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy will comply with all provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act and state and federal regulations promulgated to implement the provisions of the act. As necessary, the Conservancy will assist local Trail clubs in testing and treating water from water systems to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal regulations.

Water resources on the Appalachian Trail provide the vital water supplies needed by hikers, both along the Trail and at most designated overnight sites. Hikers have a reasonable expectation that water sources will be adequately marked. Typically, these water sources are undeveloped, and their consistency and reliability cannot be guaranteed at all times of year. Improvements such as hand pumps usually are considered only when no other water sources are available.

Because of the complexity of maintaining water systems in accordance with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the ATC declared an open-ended moratorium in 1998 on building or integrating already existing water systems to the Trail water supply.



ATC Conservation and Trail Management Policy Drinking Water

For questions related to this policy please contact the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at www.appalachiantrail.org, or P.O. Box 807, Harpers Ferry, WV, 25425-807.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy's mission is to protect, manage, and advocate for the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.